

December 5, 1988

JOEL SHAPIRO: RECENT SCULPTURES AND DRAWINGS
December 6, 1988 - January 29, 1989

The first Cleveland exhibition of works by Joel Shapiro, one of the most distinctive artists of his generation, opens at The Cleveland Museum of Art on December 6, 1988, and runs through January 29, 1989. Five large cast bronze sculptures and four large charcoal drawings will be on view in Gallery 40, another of the series in that gallery bringing exceptional contemporary art and artists to Cleveland.

Joel Shapiro, a New Yorker in his mid-40s, first began to think and work as an artist after he served in India as a Peace Corps volunteer during 1964-66. Indian sculpture and architecture seemed to represent "the whole range of human experience," he has said. His first works, both sculptures and drawings, instead approached art as idea rather than as motion or emotion; that was quite in line with the Minimalist way of working in the late 60s, which Shapiro said, "made a lot of sense, and was a very easy way to understand work...But for me it wasn't enough." In spare, austere shapes and lines he began to express human emotions and metaphors for human experience. His recent life-size works--from which this Cleveland exhibition has been chosen--are charged with the tension between abstract shape and powerful human feelings and gestures. Great, blocky chunks of bronze, balanced precariously on other chunks or bars, seem to strike human poses, to crouch, stride, or leap through space--yet as the viewer walks around them, they seem at once abstract and figurative. As Shapiro says of such a work, "It figures and disfigures as you walk around it. One side is more emblematic, another side is abstract. The problem is to register a thought in space...."

The drawings are not studies for these sculptures but rather parallel works of art, dark rectangles, blocks, and shapes flung across space and rich with meaning. One of the drawings in the show, a charcoal on paper more than six feet high, was purchased by the Museum this year. The other works, from the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York and private collectors, were chosen by Tom E. Hinson, curator of contemporary art at the Museum. Gallery talks in the exhibition will be offered at 1:30 pm on Wednesday, December 14, and Sunday, December 18.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact the Public Information Office, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, OH 44106; 216/421-7340.